

VZCZCXRO6731
RR RUEHGI RUEHMA RUEHROV
DE RUEHKH #1861/01 3311330
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 271330Z NOV 07
FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9325
INFO RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 001861

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KSCA](#) [OTRA](#) [EAID](#) [CDC](#) [SU](#)

SUBJECT: AEC PLENARY: VRAALSEN URGES PARTIES TOWARD GREATER CPA
IMPLEMENTATION

¶1. Summary: At the November 27 monthly plenary session of the Assessment and Evaluation Commission (AEC), departing Chairman Tom Vraalsen used his farewell statement to warn of the dangers of the current stalemate on implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). He urged the AEC's working groups to begin working immediately towards the mid-term report, and made one last plea for greater independence for the chairmanship. True to form, the NCP used its only statement to find fault with a minor technical point involving the status of the minutes of the last meeting. The SPLM rep expressed guarded optimism about ongoing talks between his party and the NCP over Abyei and other CPA implementation issues. End Summary.

NCP continues nitpicking on technicalities

¶2. Chairman Tom Vraalsen opened the November 27 plenary with what is usually a mere formality, the approving of the minutes. However, true to form in its attention to legalistic details, the NCP spoke up to challenge the status of the minutes. The NCO rep said the minutes should not be made public as part of the AEC's two-year status report, approved at the last plenary session. He was assured by Vraalsen that the minutes would not be part of the report.

¶3. Comment: The NCP's objection was not merely nitpicking as part of its general foot-dragging strategy on CPA implementation - although it was that as well. In negotiations over drafting of the Wealth Sharing Working Group, the NCP had persuaded the SPLM to consign some of its concerns on implementation of the wealth sharing protocol to the minutes. The SPLM did not object to not including the minutes with the report: they may not have realized the importance of the minutes in this case because their representatives at this meeting had not attended previous meetings. End Comment.

Chairman's farewell warning directed at both parties

¶4. Vraalsen then gave what he noted was his final remarks to the Commission, warning that he was "deeply concerned" about the pace of CPA implementation. While Vraalsen is often harder on the NCP's intransigence, his remarks were directed at both parties. Referring to NCP-controlled media use of the status report, he said "The AEC has never said that the CPA is 90% implemented. This is about the future of the nation - it's not a percentage game." He continued, "the alarm bells are ringing louder and louder. The parties claim to be partners," but no spirit of partnership is evident to outside observers. He noted that VP Ali Osman Taha had recently underscored the importance of the CPA during his speech on the current SPLM cabinet crisis. Neither of the two parties responded to Vraalsen's remarks.

SPLM guardedly optimistic about Abyei

¶15. When Vraalsen invited the two parties to brief the Commission on "recent political developments," as the agenda phrased it, the NCP declined comment. The SPLM representative, Malik Agar, Deputy Secretary General of the SPLM and Governor of Blue Nile state, said

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in a very low-key manner that a recent high-level meeting between the two sides was "positive," and "so there is some reason for hope." However, he warned that "we are now at the last call for resolving some of these issues," chief of which was Abyei, and there was still plenty of room for the talks to fail.

Coordinators report: ready to move ahead

¶16. Vraalsen urged Working Group Coordinators immediately to begin drafting the mid-term evaluation and assessment report, due July 9, ¶2008. The AEC Coordinators each then gave a brief report on their working groups. The Italian Ambassador said his Embassy has been trying to arrange a power sharing working group meeting with the Border Commission, but had not yet received a response to its proposal. In his own farewell remark, he seconded the Chairman's grave concern over CPA implementation. He urged the two parties to move forward, saying that the CPA was a mainstay not just for Sudan, but for the region.

¶17. The American CDA noted that the Wealth Sharing Working Group had not met since the presentation of its two-year report, but was ready to continue with meetings if the two parties agree. The Embassy is trying to obtain agreement on the next meeting as a brainstorming session to focus on transparency issues, he said. (On the margins of the meeting, an NCP rep again put off giving Embassy PolOff a response to this proposal.) Vraalsen expressed satisfaction with this approach, and urged the other Coordinators to follow the U.S. example.

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¶18. The Norwegian Ambassador used his time to speak on the general importance of the AEC, which he said was "now in a critical phase," as the only forum where the two parties could come together regularly with representatives of the international community. (Note: The Ambassador did not address the work of his Three Areas working group. However, his Embassy is preoccupied with a December visit by the Dutch Foreign Minister).

¶19. The UK DCM said the Security Working Group had also not met since the two-year report, but noted some encouraging developments in the area of Security. The Cease Fire Commission will soon be meeting, he said. He added that his Embassy would be proposing working group meetings on final deployments, and on support for the Joint Integrated Units (JIUs), including training.

Vraalsen urges more power for AEC Chairmanship

¶10. Vraalsen concluded the meeting by making a strong pitch, obviously directed at the NCP, for granting the post of AEC Chairman more power and independence. The AEC has accomplished a great deal, he said, but it has not been "visible in the public domain." While he did not believe in "megaphone diplomacy," there was a valid role in keeping the public informed. "The Chairman needs to be given more freedom of expression," he said. "He must be able to speak the truth, even if it could be construed as criticism of one party." The work of the Commission should be transparent, and its documents made available to the public.

¶11. Comment: Vraalsen concluded his frustrated tenure as AEC Chairman by appealing to both sides for flexibility and by urging the Coordinators to keep up their pressure on the two parties. We will continue working with the other Coordinators to push both parties toward progress on CPA implementation, to the extent possible. The Coordinators will soon present their proposal to the parties (and the NCP in particular) to allow greater independence to

the new chairman, though this will no doubt face resistance.

FERNANDEZ